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U.S. TEAM IN ISRAEL OVER SPYING CASE

Opens Talks Today With Three
Linked to the Navy Analyst
Accused of Espionage

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Special to The New York Times

JERUSALEM, Dec. 11 — A team of American investigators arrived in Israel today to question two Israeli diplomats and a senior counterterrorism official who have been linked to an espionage operation in Washington.

After arriving, the team, led by Abraham D. Sofaer, the State Department legal adviser, drove to Jerusalem and went into consultations with senior Israeli Foreign Ministry and intelligence officials at the Foreign Ministry building.

Israeli and American spokesman declined to give details about the activities of the American team or the nature of the discussions they will begin Thursday with the Israelis purportedly involved with Jonathan Jay Pollard, a Navy intelligence analyst accused of passing secret documents to Israel.

An American Embassy official did say the Americans "will be trying to talk to whoever here can aid them in the Pollard case." He added: "There will be no arrival statements. No press conferences, no photo opportunities that we know of. The team wants to complete their investigation as quickly as possible and then get back."

Reasons for the Secrecy

The reason for the secrecy of the meetings is not only the intelligence-related matters discussed. According to a senior Israeli official, the Government of Prime Minister Shimon Peres has become sensitive in the last week to Israeli public opinion, which is not altogether sympathetic to the idea of the Government's waiving its rights to diplomatic immunity and exposing its officials to American investigators.

"This Government went from one extreme to the other," a senior Israeli official said, "from sticking its head in the sand to over-cooperating. It realizes now that its own dignity may be at stake in the eyes of the public."

Official sources close to the case said the discussions at the Foreign Ministry this evening were designed to go over the guidelines for Thursday's meetings, which had not been completed. It

is not clear whether the Israelis being questioned will be obliged to execute sworn statements or whether their testimony could be used as evidence against Mr. Pollard.

According to Israeli and American officials, the questioning of diplomats from one country by investigators of another in an espionage-related case is without precedent.

The Israelis' Quandary

The quandary of Israeli officials is that while they want to appear to cooperate with the United States for the sake of the relationship between the two countries, they do not want to give any information that will "hang" Mr. Pollard, who is now being held without bond after having been charged with espionage.

Whatever his public image, Mr. Pollard is seen in the Israeli military apparatus as just another agent doing his job, and Israeli intelligence cannot afford to sacrifice him without undermining its credibility with its other spies around the world.

Israeli military officials believe that Mr. Pollard passed on some very valuable information. That he was discovered is generally viewed in the military establishment as an intelligence failure, a frequent occurrence in the espionage business, but not a mistake in its original conception.

That view came through strongly this evening in an Israeli radio interview with a retired intelligence officer, Col. Menachem Digly.

"I don't know anything about how the Pollard affair happened," Colonel Digly said, "but one thing I know is that the people who handled it were not fools. Whoever made the public believe that was so, only shows that he knows nothing about intelligence."

Like Looking for Oil

Colonel Digly said gathering intelligence was similar to looking for oil.

"In the case of Pollard the drill hit the main vein that was full of information, the hunger for that information was great, but the well happened to be in the yard of a good friend — but not good enough to have given us the information voluntarily," he said.

"Imagine if Pollard had provided information for years without anyone knowing about it. Does anyone doubt that it would have been viewed as vital and worth it — in spite of everything?"

It is expected, but no one here will officially confirm, that the American team will meet with Rafael Eitan, a former senior counterterrorism official reported to have been the mastermind of the Pollard operation, as well as two Israeli diplomats who were hastily withdrawn from the United States on Nov. 22, the day after Mr. Pollard was arrested. Mr. Eitan has denied involvement in the affair.

The two Israeli diplomats — Ilan Ravid, deputy science attaché at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, and Yosef Yagor, consul for scientific affairs at the Israeli Consulate in New York — were Mr. Pollard's contacts in the United States, according to Israeli officials. Both men worked for the Defense Ministry's Liaison Bureau for Scientific Affairs, which was also headed by Mr. Eitan.

Along with Mr. Sofaer, the American team includes Mark M. Richard, Deputy Assistant Attorney General; John L. Martin, chief of the Internal Security Section at the Justice Department; Joseph E. diGenova, United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, and an unidentified agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.